

Wednesday, August 20, 2003

## Summer Seas In

By TIFFANY FRANKE

At 8:30 a.m. on a still August morning, Harbormaster Don Beers sits at his desk observing the morning water activity through his binoculars and listening to the TV forecast of impending rain showers expected for the afternoon. As he answers the occasional scratchy calls from staff over the radio as they start their day in the field, he prepares for another summer day on



Harbormaster Don Beers radios the field

### MARINE DIVISION- ON THE WATERFRONT

On an ominous gray day this August, seasonal intermittent staff member Doug Mullen started his 12-8 p.m. marine division shift with a routine perusal of Duxbury's waters on the Harbormaster zodiac. Although a first year staff member, Mullen, an entering junior at Duke University, has been active on and around the water for his entire life. "The staff in the marine division must be extremely focused, especially since they are working alone 99.9% of the time," said Beers. "Their decisions can make the difference between life and



The Harbormaster's dock is teeming with boat activity in the summer months.

### ENDANGERED SPECIES ON THE BEACH

At 7:00 a.m. on a particularly cold and windy morning in rainy June, Endangered Species Officer, Jake Emerson, waited in his Suburban for the arrival of the 13 piping plover nest monitors

on shift from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. At their designated locations that stretch as far as Saquish, nearly 30 monitors on duty throughout the season collect

Although Clark's Island, the Gurnet, and Saquish all belong to Plymouth, Duxbury has a positive working relationship with the border towns and they all depend upon mutual aid. "If something happens on the Gurnet, we can get out there a lot faster than Plymouth," said Mullen as he took note of all activity before heading into the full harbor. "When you're out here, you

keep in mind who's out on the water, where they've been,

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the waterfront. For Beers, it is an anniversary of sorts, as the season marks his 25th summer patrolling Duxbury's waters.

After attending a conservation school in Unity, Maine and Northeastern in Boston, Beers, a Marshfield local, envisioned himself becoming a federal game warden. But when he accepted the position of assistant harbormaster on Duxbury's waterfront in 1977,

"I fell in love with it," he said, "and now can't imagine doing anything else." When he started, Beers was the youngest Harbormaster ever appointed in the state, and now holds the title for longest running.

"I am only as good as the staff that I hire," said Beers. The 50 staff members who work under him are "key to the success of the program," he continued. Executive Officer Dennis Pierce and Endangered Species Monitor Jake Emerson join Beers year-round, and 18 seasonal officers work in the marine, beach management, and fish & wildlife divisions in the summer months, insuring at least two people on call from 7 to 2 a.m. every day.

"We want people to see us as teachers and guides, as ambassadors more than enforcers," said Beers. Many of the seasonal staff come in as juniors in college, and return for an average of three seasons. Others are business owners, teachers and principals who "do it for the love of it," said Beers.

Many staff members receive extensive training at the harbormaster and police academies, and all are very well qualified. Each member has worked hard this summer to "provide and manage safe and appropriate access to the shores and waters while protecting the environment and its natural resources," said Beers.

death." About his fellow staff members, Mullen said, "they are incredibly trustworthy and knowledgeable... some of these guys have been out here for over 30 years."

After checking on moorings in the harbor and unwrapping various lines that had tangled

in the wind, Mullen followed the channel out of the harbor to check on the waters and shores within Duxbury's boundaries. He approached a boat where three boys were fishing but only two were wearing life jackets. He made sure they were properly equipped with another jacket and phone or radio in case of problems, and pointed out the approaching black clouds before moving on. "I lean towards education as an initial response to let people know what they're doing wrong," said Mullen. "Safety is paramount out here, but we also want people to have a good time."

The biggest challenge the department faces, Beers said, is when people who lack experience on the water fall victim to its forces. Calls often come in because someone is stranded, out of gas, or has run aground. On the day of the Clark's Island picnic, an afternoon low tide caused nearly eight calls in the matter of 20 minutes, recounted Mullen.

data on the bird activity, observe and try to prevent human disturbances, and stop traffic when birds cross the road. Consultants and scientists at Northeastern and Bridgewater State Colleges organize all recorded data and send it to the Duxbury Beach Reservation for further research and study. Because Federal regulations prohibit human activity on the beach without proper monitoring, "the monitors make it possible for the beach to be open," said Emerson. "We understand that people pay a lot to access the beach which is why we strive to provide safe and reasonable access for all visitors...the ability to co-exist is there."

After opening the first crossover, Emerson continued down the beach to check on the nests. Two-year monitor and college sophomore Kate Jones observed the plovers from a distance with binoculars so as not to disturb them. "You have to be very aware of where the birds are and what they're doing," said Jones.

and where they're going.

As the summer winds down, the harbor will empty as boats enter storage, and beach activity will slow down as vacations end and kids go back to school. Colder months will bring hunters and fisher-

man to the waters, and the responsibilities of the Harbormaster will change.

Another summer passes, and with it, the hard work of those on the waterfront to protect what Beers affectionately refers to as, "the most wonderful place in the world."